

JEREMIAH: THE PROPHET OF SORROWS

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Reference: Jeremiah 25 and 26

In the days of Hezekiah the King Isaiah the Prophet foretold that Jerusalem would be captured, and the people of Judah carried into captivity. But this prophecy did not come to pass until long after the death of Isaiah. Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, did not listen to the word of Isaiah. When he came to the throne he turned violently against the Lord, sought to root out the worship of the Lord from the land, and to establish the worship of idols. He set up altars to strange gods, even in the court of the Temple. He sought to destroy all the Law of the Lord, and all the scrolls on which the Law was inscribed, that there might be no accusation against him from the Lord before the people.

In the midst of all this wickedness the Lord was preparing another Prophet to proclaim His Word. His name Was Jeremiah. He lived to see his country conquered and his people taken away to Babylon, according to the Word of the Lord because they would not hearken to His warnings. He loved his country very deeply. The Lord showed him the danger, and the trouble that threatened it, and inspired him to cry out a warning to turn his people aside from their wickedness before it should be too late. But he cried in vain. The people would not believe him. They persecuted him, cast him into prison, and sought to take his life, because they did not want to do as the Lord commanded. And so Jeremiah suffered hard things. He has been called the Prophet of Sorrows. Jeremiah was born in Anathoth, a village of Benjamin a few miles north of Jerusalem. His father was a priest, but belonged to those who had forsaken the Lord, and had become idolaters. Jeremiah was called to the work of a Prophet while he was still a youth, living at home with his parents. And because he spoke against the idolatry into which his family had fallen he was driven out of his father's house, and compelled to take refuge in Jerusalem.

The wicked King Manasseh had died, and Josiah his son reigned in his stead. About the time that Jeremiah fled to Jerusalem, Hilkiyah the priest found in the Temple hidden away behind the veil, where Manasseh had not discovered it to destroy it, an ancient copy of the Law, or the Word. He took this copy to King Josiah and read it to him; and the King was much moved. He was very sorry for all the wickedness of his people, and he gave a commandment that all the idols, and the graven images, and groves should be destroyed, and the pure worship of the Lord again restored. Jeremiah went to his court, told him how he had been driven away from home because he spoke against the idolatry of his family, and Josiah protected him, and raised him to honor. Jeremiah

helped the King to carry out many reforms, and to overthrow all the evil practices which Manasseh had established.

In doing this he caused many to hate him with a bitter hatred. Those who wanted idols, who made money out of the worship of false gods were very angry, and sought every chance to do him harm. So long as Josiah lived, the Prophet was protected, but when the King died, and Jehoiakim came to the throne, then were his enemies able to bring suffering upon him. They told false tales in the ears of Jehoiakim. Because Jeremiah warned them that if they did not remain true to the worship of the Lord the city and the Temple would, be utterly destroyed, they told the King that he was a traitor, seeking to frighten the soldiers, and cause them to surrender to the Babylonians, who now approached under Nebuchadnezzar.

And so they had the Prophet arrested, and brought in chains before the judges at the gate of the city. There they accused him before the King, and cried out that he should be put to death. Jeremiah answered them boldly, "The Lord hath sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city. . . Behold, I am in your hands: do unto me as seemeth good unto you. But know that if you put me to death, ye shall, bring innocent blood upon your heads" (Jeremiah 26: 12-14). So strong was his love for his country that he defied all his enemies, and was willing to suffer death at their hands rather than take back the words which the Lord had put into his mouth. There were some among the judges who befriended him, and he was not put to death. But so angry were the people against him that he dared not go out among them, lest they stone him. And so for a long time he remained in hiding, and was taken care of by a close friend named Ahikam.

You children must learn to be brave and strong to defend the Church, even as Jeremiah was brave and strong to defend his country. You may some day have to fight for your Church. You may have to face danger and loss in defense of your Church. And when that day comes you must be true and loyal, and fearless, even as Jeremiah was. But do not think that you will be so unless you begin now to fight for your Church. Do you know that there are evil spirits who come to you from hell, and try to destroy the Church in you, even as the enemies of Jeremiah sought to take his life. They tempt you to do things that are wrong. And if you yield to them you are doing even what the Jews were doing in the time of Jeremiah—you are forsaking the Lord, and turning to idolatry. If you continue to do what is wrong the Church will at last be destroyed in your hearts, and you will be carried away captive, even into hell. You have a conscience that warns you, a Jeremiah that cries out within you against the doing of evil. You must be strong, you must hear his voice, and obey the Word of the Lord, if you would be truly New Church.